

INFO LOG-00 EEB-00 AF-00 AID-00 AMAD-00 ACQ-00 INL-00
DOEE-00 DOTE-00 DS-00 DHSE-00 EUR-00 OIGO-00 FAAE-00
FBIB-00 VCI-00 H-00 TEDDE-00 INR-00 IO-00 MOFM-00
MOF-00 VCIE-00 NSAE-00 ISN-00 NIMA-00 PM-00 GIWI-00
P-00 SCT-00 ISNE-00 DOHS-00 FMPC-00 SP-00 SSO-00
SS-00 T-00 NCTC-00 CBP-00 SCRS-00 PMB-00 DSCC-00
PRM-00 NFAT-00 SAS-00 FA-00 SRAP-00 SWCI-00 PESU-00
SANA-00 /000W

O 020432Z OCT 09
FM AMCONSUL PESHAWAR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8225
INFO SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
CIA WASHDC
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY
AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY
AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL PESHAWAR

S E C R E T PESHAWAR 000194

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/1/2019

TAGS: PTER MOES PREL

SUBJECT: SOUTH WAZIRISTAN MILITARY OPERATION IMMINENT

CLASSIFIED BY: Candace Putnam, Principal Officer, Peshawar,
State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: In discussions with PO September 30, FATA Secretariat XXXXXXXXXX and NWFP Social Welfare Minister Sitara Ayaz, said they believed that the long-awaited Army operation in South Waziristan was imminent. XXXXXXXXXX said the GOP had made a decision to "go for the kill" this time. He said that Commander Nazir's forces in North Waziristan largely had been neutralized and would not join the fight. Surprisingly, he predicted that the Mehsuds of South Waziristan would not fight as a tribe but would do so individually; the big battle would be between the Army and the Uzbeks who had found shelter in the area. The Army, said XXXXXXXXXX, would stay on until the FATA Secretariat could recruit the sons of former maliks to return and impose order; the goal was to prevent a power vacuum that the Taliban could exploit. The big question is whether the Army has enough forces to clear this difficult terrain against an enemy who has been preparing for months, and whether the Frontier Corps backed by local lashkars the FC hopes to create can hold this area through the approaching winter. Whenever it begins, this operation will be a big gamble for the Army.

¶2. (C) In a welcome change, it appears the Army and the civilian authorities are coordinating actions ahead of military operations. During "intense" discussions with the 11th Corps, Minister Sitara pushed for having the NWFP provincial government, rather than the Army, register the IDPs expected to flee combat. Currently, 80,000 Waziristan IDPs were in DI Khan and other areas adjacent to the settled areas; XXXXXXXXXX feared most of the approximately 500,000 inhabitants of South Waziristan would seek at least temporary shelter. Unlike the Malakand IDPs who were welcomed by the NWFP population, however, no one wants the Mehsud IDPs because they have harbored terrorists. The only presence could block/interfere with the Army's supply route. Both Sitara and XXXXXXXXXX hoped that UNHCR could help with registration of these IDPs; with the Army declaring that it will not allow NGOs into Tank at this time, efforts to provide food and temporary shelter will be particularly challenging. End summary.

¶3. (C) PO met September 30 with XXXXXXXXXX of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) Secretariat who reported that the GOP had made a decision to "go for the kill" in South Waziristan, and that Army operations could start as early as this week. We will not be "chatting" (i.e., discussing a peace agreement) with them this time said XXXXXXXXXX. He said that the Wazirs of North Waziristan largely had been neutralized and that the Army did not expect the Mehsuds of South Waziristan to fight as a tribe. (Note: On September 27, the media reported statements by some Mehsud leaders that the tribe did not want to be considered en masse as terrorists.) There would, of course, be individual pockets of Mehsud resistance, admitted XXXXXXXXXX, but the big battle would be between the Army and the Uzbeks who had taken re

¶4. (C) According to XXXXXXXXXX, the Army will take the lead on operations and will stay until the power vacuum can be filled. XXXXXXXXXX plans to recruit the sons of South Waziristan maliks who have been security forces. Once the Army comes in, he predicted that lashkars would be formed to support the hold force provided by the Frontier Corps, just as they have done in other areas.

¶5. (C) In a separate meeting with PO, XXXXXXXXXX, the Peshawar bureau chief for Dawn News, reported September 26 that the Army was holding a meeting September 28 to make final plans for the operation. XXXXXXXXXX had just met with both IG Frontier Corps MG Tariq Khan and with Chief of Army Staff General Kayani; both, said XXXXXXXXXX, were concerned about whether they had enough troops to clear, but especially to hold the area through the winter. When PO asked XXXXXXXXXX if he thought the Army had enough troops to take this battle on, the response after a long pause was that the Army thought they had the capability and that the U.S. could assist with continued strikes.

¶6. (C) According to XXXXXXXXXX, the decision to go forward was based on several factors, including concern that TTP terrorists based in South Waziristan continued to feed fighters and support to militants across the FATA and Malakand Division in the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). Interestingly, XXXXXXXXXX said that Kayani wanted to move now, before any possibility that the U.S. would pull back forces from Afghanistan and thus give militants greater operating freedom on the border areas. (XXXXXXX also said that Kayani told him he believed the Afghan Taliban wanted to become a political party and was willing to cut its ties to al-Qaida, although Kayani was not clear on how this transition would be managed.) Tariq Khan wanted to finish up current operations in Khyber before launching the Waziristan action but planned to start moving a Frontier Corps wing out of Dir to support the operation. It is not clear if the Army agreed to wait for Frontier Corps forces to be redeployed before beginning the Waziristan campaign.

¶7. (C) XXXXXXXXXX explained he had recommended to the Army that it: (a) avoid even small scale defeats because these would have a corrosive effect on local attitudes; and (b) gain control of the towns and leave the mountains until later. With winter approaching, the militants will be on the run and easier to spot when they build their fires in the hills. There was a possibility that the militants will flee and blend into populations in the settled areas, but this will mean that Pakistan has moved on to a second and less dangerous phase of the insurgency. Success in South Waziristan, he claimed, will have a ripple effect on Mohmand, Bajaur, Orakzai and Bajaur, and the militants will lose their training camps.

18. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX told PO that Tariq Khan admitted there still is a problem in Orakzai, home to Hakimullah and a source of fighters bleeding into Mohmand, and in Kurram, where the Iranians had been, until recently, facilitating the flow of fighters in to Pakistan. PO noted that Tariq Khan and others were concerned that if the TTP was pushed out of the Waziristans, they would set up operations in the Tirah Valley, especially in Orakzai; XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX agreed and said this was why it was so important that the U.S. launch strikes against Mangal Bagh. Ongoing military operations had forced Bagh out of Bara, and he had moved to the Tirah Valley where he can claim to be a feudal leader and demand the support of the population. Now, however, Bagh is trading Taliban protection for giving them access to the Tirah Valley. If Bagh can be eliminated, his criminal/terrorist followers will have no way to demand the loyalty of the local population, insisted XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX.

19. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX remains a strong advocate of U.S. strikes. In fact, he suggested to PO that the U.S. consider follow-on attacks immediately after an initial strike. He explained that after a strike, the terrorists seal off the area to collect the bodies; in the first 10-24 hours after an attack, the only people in the area are terrorists, so "you should hit them again-there are no innocents there at that time." His sources report that the reported September 29 strike in South Waziristan had been particularly successful; "you will see that you hit more than has been reported in the press both in terms of quantity and quality." XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX also drew a diagram essentially laying out the rationale for signature strikes that eliminated terrorist training camps and urged that the U.S. do more of these.

More IDPs Expected

10. (C) Over the September 26-27 weekend, FATA Radio Station Razmak advised the population in four towns of South Waziristan to move out ahead of expected military operations. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX said he had directed the FATA Secretariat to make an accurate assessment of how many IDPs would flee; initially, he had estimated that only those in the northern area of South Waziristan around Maken would move. After repeated publicity about the operation, he feared that most of the South Waziristan population (over 500,000) would want to escape the fighting. These tribal people would not want to stay in camps but would seek shelter from families, much like the Malakand IDPs.

11. (C) However, XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX said the Mehsuds were creating a big problem. Unlike the Malakand IDPs who were given shelter and support from the people of NWFP, no one wants the Mehsuds because they are considered to have supported terrorists and because of fears terrorists will use an IDP exodus as cover to escape. This meant that the only area they could go to was Tank, where an IDP exodus/presence could block or interfere with the Army's supply route. Habibullah was struggling to come up with a solution on how to care for these people. (Note: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX said a similar problem affected the Bajaur IDPs; because few NWFP and FATA Secretariat bureaucrats had much sympathy for people who were thought to have been hospitable to the Taliban, the government was reluctant to assist and suggested the Bajauris be forced home.)

12. (C) In a separate meeting with PO September 30, NWFP Social Welfare Minister Sitara Ayaz confirmed her belief that the Waziristan operation was imminent. She had been in "intense" meetings with 11th Corps Chief of Staff BG Aamer all morning about how to cope with the expected IDPs. The Army has said clearly that it will not allow NGOs in Tank at this time; PO expressed concern about the ability of UNHCR or the World Food Program to operate there given the security situation. Sitara agreed this could be an issue but expressed concern over the Army's plans to register the IDPs, saying that this should be the task of the civilian government. She offered the assistance of her ministry or Pakistani NGOs working for UNHCR to handle registrations. XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX also indicated that he hoped UNHCR would be able to handle registrations of IDPs staying with families and said he had asked for assistance in coming up with an appropriate methodology. Sitara felt the problem was manageable but said it would require both an initial registration and follow up with the host families to monitor who would be eligible for assistance. Many of the current 80,000 Waziristan IDPs and the expected future wave had homes in the settled area near Tank and DI Khan, so considering them as IDPs was problematic. She did not believe it would be necessary to set up an IDP camp for this group.

13. (C) Comment: Speculation about the start of a Waziristan campaign has been rising since the death of Baitullah Mehsud, with the Frontier Corps eager to begin and the Army reluctant to initiate ground action until they had sufficient forces deployed. We understand that the expected October 10 change of command at 11th Corps has been postponed, perhaps in anticipation of operations; Consulate sources expect the operation could begin on/around October 7. However, so far we have detected none of the military preparations that would prestige an operation of this size, including renewed air strikes, a change in operational readiness, or a significant movement of troops.

14. (C) Comment continued: Regardless of preparatory work, this will be a big gamble for the Army. TTP elements have had months to prepare defenses in depth, and we know from experience these are committed fighters regardless of any splits within TTP leadership. Extending food and assistance to Waziristan NGOs in Tank will be a difficult challenge given poor security; post will contact WFP and UNHCR to assess current possibilities of providing this assistance. According to UNHCR, as of September 26, military search operations and curfews in effect in Tank have for several days made registration and assistance provision impossible, although civilian authorities at the time expected these disruptions to last for only a few more days. The fact that the Army and the civilians appear to be coordinating actions in advance of military operations is a notable and welcome change.